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ABSTRACT

Noting that oral communication skills need continuous refinement, this document outlines various methods of practicing these skills, such as literature circles in reading; a reader's theater; presentations of book reports; story telling; a poetry reading club; and choral reading. The document describes literature circles as small groups of readers who discuss a selection in a comfortable environment. It also explains that in a reader's theater, students read selections out loud as a dialogue, emphasizing expression. The document notes that in reading book reports aloud, students may realize the following: how fluently the book report was given; how the non-verbal affects the verbal presentation; how voice inflection can improve effectiveness of a presentation; how practice can make speaking easier in front of a group; and how to redo the oral book report with feedback from a video tape. In addition, the document explains that through story telling or a poetry reading club, students can explore creative ways of communicating. The final suggestion of the document, choral reading, provides students the opportunity to blend their voice with the others in the group. (Contains 10 references.) (PM)

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Oral Communication in Reading.

by Marlow Ediger

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Oral Communication in Reading

Oral communication skills need continuous refinement. No one has arrived at perfection, but it is always a matter of achieving from where one is presently to a reasonable ideal. There are indeed excellent opportunities for pupils to achieve oral communication skills in reading. The teacher then needs to set achievable objectives which are challenging to the learner.

Communicating well with others is a basic in school and in society. When individuals do not communicate effectively, misunderstandings occur and human relations tend to go downhill. Thus, it is imperative that pupils learn to communicate effectively with others. Oral communication skills need to be developed across the curriculum. Each curriculum area might then make its contributions to effective oral communication. This paper will focus on oral communication skills in the reading curriculum.

No state mandated test has an oral communications skill component, and yet it truly is a basic in the curriculum. Oral commutation skills cannot be tested in a state mandated test. That is perhaps one reason why it is not on this type of evaluation device. State mandated tests are machine scored in mass numbers. Thus, many facets of the curriculum can be tested, but oral communication has alluded the process. In world history, there have been many cases of misinterpretation of oral content due to translation from one language to another as well as faulty communication in the same language. Perhaps, every human being has experienced a conversation whereby he/she meant something else than what was communicated orally. The involved person remorsefully thinks, "If I only had said it differently and the way I truly meant it to be." But alas, the oral communication has been completed and cannot be erased. One can say on the spot, "But that is not what i meant, I meant to say this instead ..."

Accuracy in oral communication is very important and saying what was intended is salient. How can oral communication lessons make for accuracy, good human relations, and effective behavior on the part of each pupil?

Literature Circles in Reading

Literature circles may provide a committee of learners a plethora of opportunities in learning to express themselves well orally. The literature circle may consist of four members who

have read the same book, generally in paperback form. These pupils might then interact freely during the small group method of study. A few standards need to be emphasized so that the group performs optimally. These standards include the following:

1. all need to participate.
2. no one should dominate the discussion.
3. learners need to stay on, not digress, from the topic being discussed.
4. each pupil should feel free to ask questions as well as to think critically and creatively within the circle.
5. politeness and acceptance of others is salient.

Literature circle members should be highly knowledgeable of the contents of the book being discussed. Knowledge objectives then are important in order to analyze subject matter as well as to synthesize content discussed. Problems in the subject matter need to be identified and solved. Then too, pupils should use and apply that which has been learned. Using proper skills in oral communication are a must. Thus, the pupil needs to clarify ideas being presented, speaking in a pleasant voice with appropriate stress, pitch, and juncture. He/she needs to face others, when orally communicating, depending upon who is being spoken to within the group. Making connections among ideas presented is important. Unnecessary mannerisms need to be avoided. Video taping a literature circle session assists pupils to view themselves, each other and notice what makes for a successful group endeavor. A chair person may be elected or assigned. Leadership may also arise spontaneously within the literature circle discussion, thus emphasizing emergent leadership (See Gunning, 2000).

Reader's Theater

Being able to read well orally is very important. Reader's theater is liked by many pupils when readiness is in evidence and provides opportunities for oral communication. A team of pupils may select a paperback to read which contains much dialog or is suitable for writing as dialog. The connections here need to be made between reading and writing.

Once each part has been clearly written as dialog, pupils individually my select a character's role to read aloud. Role playing is important here through oral reading. The different readers need to blend their individual role with others in reader's theater. Thus, a rehearsed play results, but parts are read aloud, not memorized. Members usually are seated on stools, easily

visible by listeners to the presentation. Each part is read aloud with expression as the character whose role is being played might do. Feeling and voice inflection go into the reader's theater presentation. Appropriate interpretation of the role being played is salient. In addition to individuals choosing a part to read in reader's theater, another person needs to read aloud and in a creative manner, background information necessary for the characters to play their roles meaningfully. The background information is not a dialog part, but presents needed information to understand the narrative contents. Thus, the setting of the story might have a considerable amount of subject matter necessary to understand the total narrative. Or, as the scene changes, a reader needs to read an explanation of the new setting of the story. The background information must also capture listener attention and not be dull, nor boring. Readers Theater then may be a highly enjoyable activity, not only in the writing of play parts, but also in reading aloud sequential play parts of participants in the ongoing learning experience (Ediger and Rao, 2000, Chapter Seven).

Round robin oral reading approaches is criticized much by reading specialists. Here, adequate background information is presented to pupils who will be reading aloud the selection assigned from the basal reader. Generally, the teacher has three reading groups within the total class. One of the three groups is discussing with teacher direction what has been read. This is followed by the teacher evaluating the quality of oral reading done by each child. Feedback provides opportunities for the teacher to notice deficiencies, if any, that an individual pupil may have in word recognition or in fluent reading. Critics of this approach call attention to the embarrassment faced by the less fluent reader to read aloud. Most pupils do like to read aloud. In fact, the teacher is reminded rather quickly if a pupil has been omitted from oral reading yesterday or the day before. To minimize criticisms of round robin reading approaches, the author would like to make the following recommendations:

1. no pupil is to be ridiculed or minimized.
2. each is to be respected and this rule is strictly enforced.
3. pupils individually, as they read silently, are given needed help to identify words correctly.
4. learners may use head phones to listen to story content, if desired, to aid in identifying unknown word when reading silently. Later, with Round Robin reading, the pupil will be more successful in oral reading.
5. peer reading may be stressed for those who desire to

read together. In this way problems with word recognition will be minimized. In sequence, round robin approaches will then be more successful with fluent reading (Ediger, 1981, 13- 17).

If the above named conditions are followed, round robin reading has its benefits to offer children. The psychological environment will then provide for increased security in reading aloud. Oral reading should then provide for better communication with others. There are a plethora of situations in which quality oral reading is wanted such as reading the minutes of an organizational meeting aloud to club members, reading aloud the Sunday School lesson in class prior to the ensuing related discussions, reading to young children in public library book sessions, and reading orally to siblings in the home setting, among others.

Shared reading is an interesting way to enjoy library book content. Here, a group of five pupils may select a library book and then take turns reading it aloud. The first person reads a short selection and then gives the book to the next pupil. Each child then reads a specific part and hands the library book to the next person for sequential reading. Cooperative endeavors also help pupils in learning to get along with others Ediger, 2000, 210-211).

Giving Book Reports

Oral book reports given in class need to emphasize selected standards so that effective communication takes place. Contents n the library book need to be understood well by the reader. The pupil then needs to organize ideas effectively so that a quality oral book report will be given. If the report deals with expository subject matter, the pupil might wish to outline the content so that it may be referred to while reporting. By identifying the main ideas, the subordinate ideas, and the details and writing these in outline form, the pupil can feel more secure while giving the oral report to classmates. The outline is there if the pupil cannot think of sequential ideas in front of the class. It might also be good for the pupil to practice given the report in front of a mirror. Video taping the oral report before its presentation in class provides the learner with feedback before its presentation to class members.

Here, the pupil may notice

1. how fluently the oral book report was given.
2. how the non-verbal (use of gestures, facial expressions, body movements, and so on) affects the verbal

presentation.

3. how voice inflection can help make the oral book report more effective.

4. how practice can make speaking easier in front of a group. With practice, poise should be an end result .

5. how to redo the oral book report with feedback from the video tape.

Individuals who have overcome fears when appearing in front of a group have marveled how pleasant and rewarding it is to give oral presentations. It is truly rewarding to give oral presentations to an audience (Ediger, 1989, 109- 115).

Story Telling

People tend to enjoy listening to stories told to an audience and also within the framework of conversations. The stories need to capture listener attention. They may be a retelling of a tall tale like Paul Bunyan or Johnny Appleseed, for example. Story telling might also involve personal happenings which would interest others such as a very unusual day with peculiar happenings. It, too, might emphasize creative content developed by the speaker and presented to a formal classroom audience or informally in conversation. Stories told in class might involve the following:

1. folk tales such as Aesop's fables. Legends, myths, tall tales, and fairy tales make up the category of folk tales.

2. a short story or a novel, harmonizing with the developmental level of the pupil.

3. a Newbery Award winner such as "Summer of the Swans," by Betsy Byars. This book received the Newbery Award in 1971.

4. a Caldecott Award winner, given for the best illustrated children's library book, such as "Where the Wild Things Are" by Maurice Sendak. This book received the Caldecott Award in 1964.

5. riddles and jokes. These are especially important for younger children. Riddles and jokes, like all stories, need careful preparation prior to their presentation to classmates. The punch line is important and must receive adequate emphasis. Wordless books are excellent sources for story telling (Ediger, 1982, 35-50).

There are a plethora of values for pupils to achieve when engaging in story telling. Among others, the following are important:

1. it can assist pupils to read much content to obtain what is good literature for story telling.
2. it helps learners to appreciate quality literature.
3. it captures pupil's attention in the area of vocabulary development.
4. it draws the pupil's attention to proper voice inflection, engaging listeners to attend carefully to contents spoken, as well as self satisfaction in developing feelings of belonging and esteem or recognition for something done well.
5. it guides pupils to improve reading skills (See

Oral communications skills are improved upon through story telling. Creativity is in evidence if a pupil tells an original story or if a published story is used in a unique, novel manner in the telling of stories. Appearing before groups provide opportunities for all to perform. There is no dichotomy here between rich and poor, as there may be when, in after school programs, a pupil takes paid piano lessons, for example, and then performs later in a recital. All pupils need to develop a sense of personal worth which is so important in being successful in life (Ediger, 1987, 81- 83).

A Poetry Reading Club

Selected pupils enjoy working within an organizations such as a Poetry Reading Club. The Club could be very informal with no officers, but leadership emerges as the group's activities progresses. One important rotating role emphasizes a pupil with teacher guidance being responsible for library books containing poetry to be displayed, for checking out, and for placing them at a learning center. Poems need to

1. deal with a variety of topics to meet needs of readers.
2. contain content on different levels of reading achievement, some easier and some more difficult to read.
3. capture learner interest.

Pupils need to read poems aloud to others in the Poetry Reading Club. Quality voice inflection and facing peers and the teacher is important while reading aloud. A major objective here is to get pupils in wanting to read more poetry. The teacher needs to model proper standards in reading poetry aloud to listeners. He/she should develop the initial bulletin board display for the Club. After that, members of the club might take turns or work collaboratively in putting up enticing bulletin board displays. The display, in part, may emphasize new poetry books which have been purchased for the school library. Poetry

Reading Club members need to know which books are available for reading.

Meetings of the club may include the following activities and processes:

1. reading poetry aloud to Club members.
2. discussion selected ideas from each poem read aloud to members.
3. knowing the type of poem read aloud ... couplets, triplets, quatrains, limericks, haiku, tankas, acrostic, or free verse, among others.
4. locating information about the author(s) of the poem presented.
5. reading poems effectively to secure learner attention.
6. paying careful attention to enunciation, pitch, rhythm, and meter.
7. providing meaningful oral reading so that each pupil might understand contents in the poem read (See Garth, 2002).

Poetry lends itself to creative dramatizations. Thus, the content in the poem read might stress pantomiming. No oral use of language is involved in pantomiming. Actions then are used, instead, to bring meaning across to observers pertaining to the poem read. Gestures, facial expressions, and body movements are used to convey meaning. A pupil or team of pupils may select a poem to pantomime. They need to practice doing the pantomime. Pupils then hypothesize what the pupil is pantomiming. This activity makes for interest and excitement. All educated guesses must be accepted in an atmosphere of respect (See Barth, 2002).

Choral Reading to Communicate ideas

Choral reading can be a highly beneficial kind of experience for pupils to communicate with others. Poetry or prose may be used in choral reading. Here, pupils need to blend their own voice with that of others in the group. Collaboration is important. This can be a good activity for shy pupils. The focal point is blending of voices and working together to achieve objectives. Major emphasis then is placed upon the harmonious blending of voices, although there can be solo, duet, and trio parts. Wanda Gag's book Millions of Cats is very suitable for choral reading. There may be a solo part to read each section of new content followed by choral reading of the refrain which reads:

Hundreds of cats, thousands of cats, millions and billions and trillions of cats... (See Smith,1979).

Blended voices can make for a beautiful choral reading involving pupils. Pupils have the opportunity of reading orally and achieve reading skills as they follow the script in their own book. A Big Book approach may be used whereby all can clearly see the library book contents from where they are located. An opaque projector might be used to enlarge Millions of Cats if the Big Book is not available. Clear pronunciation of words by each pupil is necessary in choral reading. Fluent, confident reading should be inherent by participants. Cooperation among pupils in the choral reading activity has to be in evidence for the experience to be positive. Solo parts need to blend in well with the total choral reading experience. If two or three pupils have a collective part, these need to be harmonized. Separate parts may also be given to boys and to girls for a quality part of the choral reading activity. Careful attention should be given to punctuation marks in the script. Reading in thought units is essential in providing holism in the oral presentation. Hopefully, pupils will be encouraged to read more literature made up of a variety of genres and provide clarity in oral communication (Ediger, 1983, 7- 11).

Closing

There are plethora of oral activities which correlate and integrate well with story telling. In addition to those mentioned above, pupils may also engage in

1. formal and creative dramatizations involving subject matter read in presenting an oral communication experience.
2. impromptu speaking.
3. making and using puppets/marionettes in oral communication activities.

Teachers need to expand oral communication activities for children since it is vital to communicate clearly and meaningfully with others. Oral communication skills are a basic and are interdisciplinary for all learners.

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